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PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RESOLUTION 578 (XXI) ON THE AFRICAN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON THE ENVIRONMENT

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This report gives a brief background to the first African Ministerial Conference on the Environment held in Cairo from 15 to 18 December 1985 and examines the progress being made by ECA in contributing to the implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action which emanated from the Conference.

II. BACKGROUND

2. It will be recalled that the first African Ministerial Conference on the Environment was held in Cairo, Egypt in December 1985. The meeting was held in response to UNEP Governing Council decision 11/7 of May 1983 which, among other things:

(a) Requested the Executive Director of UNEP to accord high priority in the provision of assistance to African countries in dealing with their most urgent environmental problems in Africa;

(b) Invited the governments of Africa to convene, in co-operation with regional organizations and institutions, an African Environment Conference to discuss national environmental priorities and identify common problems worthy of a regional programme of action to deal with serious environmental problems in Africa.1/ ECA and OAU participated with UNEP, in the implementation of this resolution right from the preparatory stages.

3. The executive Director of UNEP, in co-operation with OAU and ECA, and in consultation with a number of African Governments and United Nations agencies, immediately began the groundwork for the Conference. The Conference laid down guidelines for a programme of work, an important aspect of which was the development and/or the enhancing of regional networks for environmental management in Africa. The eight suggested networks were:2/

(a) Environmental management;

4. This network is supposed to bring together existing national technical departments, subregional institutions particularly remote sensing centres and regional institutions to form a regional environmental monitoring system.

1/ See African Environmental Conference: Report of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, prepared in consultation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), UNEP document No. UNEP/AEC/IAWG/8, Sept. 1985.

2/ See African Environmental Conference: Report of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme; document No. UNEP/AEC/IAWG/8, Sept. 1985.

(b) Climatology;

5. The climatology network would be closely connected with the activities to be carried out in pursuance of ECA Conference of Ministers resolution 528 (XIX) adopted in May 1984, as well as ongoing WMO activities in the region, especially the proposed African Centre of Meteorological Applications for Development (ACMAD).

(c) Soil studies including fertilizers;

6. The activities of network would promote the establishment of links between soil studies departments and centres in Africa and its functions would include addressing the issues involved in the production of cheap soil amelioration measures and fertilizers.

(d) Water resources;

7. The network on water resources is supposed to address both quantitative and qualitative aspects of water, in particular issues relating to monitoring of the quality of surface and underground water.

(e) Renewable sources of energy;

8. Drawing on national, subregional and regional machineries, this network would promote the speedy development of practical projects, the dissemination of technical information and the training of personnel.

(f) Conservation of genetic resources:

9. This network would cover natural resources and protected areas, germplasm banks in Africa and promote the dissemination of related information.

(g) Science and technology;

10. The network would forge links between national institutions working in the field of science and technology and research and development.

(h) Environmental education and training.

11. The activities of this network would include the promotion of environmental education in schools and institutes of higher education as well as focus on training farmers and stock breeders in proven techniques. The activities of these networks would be integrated by participating agencies into their relevant network activities as the case may be.

12. Added to these networks were regional pilot projects which would be aimed at utilizing "all available African skills and experience to seek economically feasible, environmentally sound and socially acceptable solutions to the complex problems of grassroot development, in 150 villages and 30 semi-arid stock-raising zones". There were also subregional activities which

were classified under four headings, corresponding to the principal natural units of Africa, namely: deserts and arid lands; river and lake basins; forests and woodlands; and seas.3/

13. In its resolution 1 the Cairo Conference recommended that it should take over the present functions of ECA's Joint Intergovernmental Regional Committee on Human Settlements and Environment.

III. ECA ACTIVITIES AFTER THE CONFERENCE

14. A report E/ECA/CM.12/27 on the Conference was made to the twenty-first session of the ECA Conference of Ministers in April 1986 which adopted its resolution 578 (XXI); part III dealt with the Institutionalization of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment. It endorsed:

(a) "The institutionalization of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment to meet every two years to review the Cairo Programme for African Co-operation on the Environment and Eco-development; and

(b) Decided "that the existing Joint Intergovernmental Regional Committee on Human Settlements and Environment, whose establishment was decided upon in the Lagos Plan of Action and by General Assembly resolution 32/162 of 19 December 1977 and Conference of Ministers resolutions 316 (XII) of February 1975 and 408 (XVI) of 10 April 1981, should serve as the Technical Advisory Working Group of African Experts to the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment"; the resolution also

(c) Recommended that "the Executive Secretary consult with the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity in order to establish modalities for co-operation between the Joint Intergovernmental Regional Committee on Human Settlements and Environment and the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment and to ascertain the legal status of the latter within the United Nations system, and to report to the Commission at its twenty-second session in 1987".

15. In July 1986 the first meeting of the Interagency Working Group (IAWG) of the Conference was held in Geneva, Switzerland. This group was set up by the Conference and has the mandate to co-ordinate the activities of the international agencies in relation to the implementation of the Cairo Programme and to serve as a scientific and technical advisory body to the Bureau of the Conference through the permanent Secretariat. The meeting had as its main task, the distribution of responsibilities, particularly regarding the functioning of the regional networks. The other important matter was that of the resources for implementing the programme. The Executive Director of UNEP informed the IAWG that of the forty-one countries that were a party to the Conference, five have expressed reservations on the figures for their

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3/ See report of the Executive Director, op.cit, p.22.

contribution as being too high. Of the remaining thirty-six, four have indicated their acceptance of their share, sixteen have indicated that they have already presented the matter to the department responsible for dealing with such matters.

16. As concerns the mentioned earlier networks, ECA accepted to take on the responsibility of four, if the resources for their implementation were made available by the Conference. These included:

(a) Environmental monitoring: Negotiations would be made with the Regional Remote Sensing Centre in Ouagadougou, the Regional Centre for services in Surveying, Mapping and Remote Sensing (RCSSMRS) in Nairobi and the Regional Centre for Training in Aerial Survey at Ile-Ife (RECTAS) for the possibilities of their handling this;

(b) Water resources: Arrangements would be made with the Water Resources Unit of the Natural Resources Division at ECA for it to handle this, as well as the one for renewable sources of energy;

(c) Science and Technology: Arrangements would be made with the African Regional Centre for Technology in Dakar and with the Science and Technology Unit in the Natural Resources Division of ECA to deal with this;

(d) Environmental Education and Training: The Environment Section at ECA would handle this area as it is presently involved in a Joint project with UNEP on the introduction of environmental components into the training programmes of ECA-sponsored institutions. It is useful to note here that these institutions are backed by contributions from member States who actively participate in the policy orientations of the institutions.

17. With the above arrangements in mind, the Environment in Africa work programme budget that is being proposed for 1988-1989, provides for the inclusion of these activities. However, this does not preclude the situation that, if the Conference makes the necessary resources available earlier, implementation would immediately begin.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CAIRO PROGRAMME OF ACTION

18. Following on the advisory meeting of the Interagency Working Group, the Executive Secretary of ECA wrote to UNEP to confirm the offers made, for ECA to host four of the eight regional networks as stated earlier. He also suggested to the Executive Director of UNEP that, since the ECA was unable to provide one member of its three-member professional staff in the Environment Co-ordinating Section to work on a full-time basis at the Conference Secretariat, a programme of work for the latter should be drawn up between UNEP, ECA and the OAU to enable ECA to contribute more fully to the work of the Conference Secretariat for the implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action. Such a work programme has now been drawn up when the ECA Chief of the Environment spent a working week at the Conference Secretariat in Nairobi last November 1986. The programme of work for the Conference

Secretariat has now made provisions for ECA to provide similar working periods in Nairobi to assist in the preparations of documents and organization of meetings up to the second meeting of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment and the UNEP Governing Council at its fourteenth session in June 1987.

19. The First meeting of the Conference (AMCEN) Bureau took place at UNEP, Nairobi, 7 to 9 October 1986. ECA was unable to attend the Bureau meeting because it was engaged in organizing the ECA/WMO Interagency Expert Consultations on the establishment of the Centre ACMAD in Bujumbura, Burundi 8 to 10 October 1986 at the same time. From the report of the Bureau meeting submitted as document UNEP/AEC/B1/10, the following summary of activities indicate the progress which has been made in the implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action, following on the institutionalization of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment:

(a) The Conference Secretariat has been established at UNEP, Nairobi;

(b) The four Conference Committees on (i) deserts and arid lands, (ii) forests and woodlands; (iii) rivers and lake basins; and (iv) seas, have been established. The Chairman for the Desert and Arid Lands Committee, H.E. Cheikh A. Khadre Cissokho, Minister for the Protection of Nature in Senegal, proposed a programme for the Committee. Based on the discussion on the programme, the Bureau requested the Conference Secretariat to prepare guidelines for the operational and organizational arrangements for the Committees. The guidelines were considered by the Bureau meeting and each of the remaining Committees is now engaged in preparing its own draft terms of reference. This will comprise of three sections: first, the structure dealing with membership, national focal points as African experts, as well as observers and experts from the United Nations, IGOs and NGOs, and their linkages, a small secretariat, and the technical tools required; secondly, a work plan with priorities will be drawn up; and thirdly, the financial resources required in a proposed budget with provisions for evaluation to be built in;

(c) Establish and/or strengthen the eight technical co-operation networks. The Bureau meeting decided to approve, after a general discussion: firstly, the terms of reference for the eight networks; secondly, the criteria for the selection of institutions for the networks prepared by the Secretariat and the application of such criteria to institutions nominated by Governments; thirdly, that preference should be given to African institutions with the requisite standing and record in the selection of institutions as focal points for the networks. Other existing institutions in the Africa region are expected to support the selected national institutions. Based on these criteria and taking into consideration the report of the Interagency Working Group, the Bureau decided to locate the Regional Co-ordinating Units for the five priority networks as follows: Environmental Monitoring at UNEP/GEMS temporarily:

(i) Climatology at WMO's Centre is hosted;

(ii) Soils and fertilizers at the Bil Research Institute of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, Kumasi, Ghana:

(iii) Energy at the Centre for the Study and Research on Renewable Sources of Energy in Dakar, Senegal;

(iv) Water resources at the Water Resources Institute, in Cairo, Egypt.

(d) The programme of pilot projects for food and energy self-sufficiency in 150 villages and in 30 semi-arid stock-raising sites, is now being implemented. After discussion, the Bureau decided that the Conference Secretariat should proceed to arrange support for implementing pilot projects according to certain criteria agreed upon which are based on earmarked IPF or voluntary contributions and on the identification of named villages and/or semi-arid stock-raising sites by the Governments.

20. The Bureau meeting also examined the responses from each of the African countries to the questionnaire sent out earlier by the Conference Secretariat on (a) request for names and positions of African nationals to serve as experts in the four Conference Committees; (b) request for national institutions to function as focal points within any of the eight technical co-operation networks; (c) request for names of three selected villages and/or a stock-raising site in a semi-arid zone in the country for the pilot projects; and (d) on arrangements for voluntary financial contribution to the Programme.

21. Finally the first Bureau meeting considered the financial situation for the implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action. The Bureau decided that the President of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment and the Conference Secretariat should direct further appeals to governments, with the Vice-Presidents dealing with their respective subregions, in order to urge the finalization of the arrangements being made by the governments to finance the Programme of Action.

22. The Conference Bureau then dealt briefly on the relationships between the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development and its related African Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (APPER) 1986-1990. Then it announced that the Second meeting of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment will take place in Nairobi from 2 to 4 June 1987 to be preceded by: (a) meetings of each of the four Conference Committees in February 1987 except Seas Committee; (b) Second meeting of the Interagency Working Group at IFAD, Rome in March 1987; and (c) the Second meeting of the Conference Bureau at the end of March 1987 in Cairo or Harare.

CONCLUSIONS

23. This ECA subsidiary body, the Joint Intergovernmental Regional Committee on Human Settlements and Environment has been proposed to serve as an advisory body of African experts to the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) under ECA resolution 570 (XXI) at the twelfth meeting of the ECA Conference of Ministers at Yaounde, Cameroon in April 1986. This fourth meeting of the Joint Committee is called upon to examine the work done so far and to make positive recommendations on the implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action, 1986-1991. It is noted that the proposed Environment in Africa Work Programme for the 1988-1989 biennium already contain elements of the decisions of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment in its planned activities.